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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE ATTIC

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Attic," submitted by James Osborne in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Ben Tarver
Supervisor

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Dated September 8, 1973

ABSTRACT

The format of the thesis is that of a preface and an original full-length play. THE ATTIC is a drama in two acts and involves four characters. The play deals with a grotesque form of adoption of one individual by a household.

A young man, Jeff, rents an attic apartment from an elderly couple, Bill and Betty Linton. He is drawn into becoming a confidant for both and is exposed to a relationship for which he is unable to decipher what is real and what is imaginary. Unknown to Jeff, the former tenant of the attic suite, Jennie, is living downstairs as part of the Linton household. She makes his acquaintance and, masquerading as an outsider, visits him. An intimate relationship develops which plays a part in his eventual assimilation.

The play explores the role of fantasy in communication and the influence of instinctual forces in shaping human behaviour and contact.

The preface deals with THE ATTIC in relation to three plays which I have previously written. It also contains an analysis of the play in terms of its characters and its dramatic structure.

PREFACE

THE ATTIC is not a realistic play, despite the everyday nature of much of its dialogue, its naturalistic setting, and its chronological time span. The nature of the play is best explored through a review of my previous works, THE ATTIC in relation to these, and an analysis of the script in terms of its characters and dramatic structure.

Previous Works

THE ATTIC is the fourth stage play which I have written. The first was an adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's novel, INVITATION TO A BEHEADING (produced by Theatre 3, Edmonton, October, 1972). The second was an original one-act play, entitled BY THE SEA (produced by Theatre 3, Edmonton, February, 1973, and Tarragon Theatre, Toronto, March, 1973). The third was also a one-act play, SYLVIA (to be produced by Theatre 3, Edmonton, February, 1974).

The novel, INVITATION TO A BEHEADING, I felt should be dramatized because of the bizarre light it throws on the question of communication.

The central figure, Cincinnatus, has been imprisoned and sentenced to death for an unspecified crime. The nature of the crime unfolds over the course of the play: It is an inability to accept an absurd surface reality.

Cincinnatus is surrounded by fragments of human beings. The visitors to his cell, both relatives and prison staff, are self-absorbed, two-dimensional people, submerged in the tasks of everyday life, be it marital infidelity or bureaucratic nonsense. They attempt to teach Cincinnatus the joys of life which they have discovered. Cincinnatus goes to his death for the crime of refusing to forfeit his humanity.

The question of communication, its limitations and form, is again explored in BY THE SEA. The play is written in a naturalistic vein although it is symbolic to a degree. Each of the characters (Mildred, Harry, and Jun) has constructed his or her own world. Each individually defined reality is unique and foreign to that of the other characters. The fantasy element common to both the world of Jun and that of Mildred permits a degree of contact between them. Harry, with the most limited perception of the three, is aware of the relationship established but fails to recognize the nature of it. His possessiveness with regards to Mildred drives him to an attempt to destroy the bond between Mildred and Jun.

BY THE SEA, in its use of symbolism, touches upon the ritualistic and the archetypal, in addition to the problem of the frequent limits to communication. Harry's complete possession of Mildred is impossible because she is a more sensitive and perceptive human being than he. But beyond

this there is another more formidable obstacle to Harry's control of her--the instinctual nature of the woman.

Mildred returns each year to a particular spot by the sea for a ceremony--the commemoration of the death of her dog which was, for her, a substitute child. The dog had drowned "accidently" with Harry's help. Over the course of the chance encounter with Jun, a Japanese boy, Mildred "adopts" him, to Harry's dismay. The play culminates in Harry's killing of the boy. However, far from serving to extend his possession of Mildred, Harry's act provides her with a real object for her maternal instincts. At the end of the play, events suggest Mildred will return the following year to repeat her ceremony, but for a real child rather than a substitute one.

The ritualistic as a dramatic device finds an even greater expression in SYLVIA.

The play is a dramatic encounter of two characters, John and Diane. They have and do indulge in fantasies about the same person, namely, Sylvia. With this common interest, their contact is of a much more intimate nature than that of the characters in BY THE SEA.

Sylvia is desired by both John and Diane. The interaction of the two takes the form of an ambiguous surface sparring. The verbal exchange is, in fact, a facade for the clash and concurrence of sexual instincts. Because the veiled driving forces behind the encounter are instinctual,

the actions of the characters become primitive, seemingly irrational. The contact acquires ritualistic trappings. For instance, Diane has John re-enact his sexual conquest of Sylvia, with Diane playing the woman. At the same time, however, Diane treats John as a substitute for Sylvia.

To summarize, my three previous plays have explored the question of communication. They have highlighted a few facets of the nature of human contact as I perceive it.

The first and most obvious aspect is the limit set on communication by a difference in level of intelligence, perception, and sensitivity among human beings.

A second aspect is each individual's unique definition of reality. A person constructs a world of his own. To others it may be fantasy. But the others, too, have each his own imagined reality. Human encounter often becomes a sharing of fantasies rather than direct communication.

A third aspect in the nature of human contact is the role of the instincts. The instincts can shape the form of interaction with others. I find this the most potentially dramatic aspect of human behaviour. In a dramatic work, the instincts, as propelling forces in the actions of the characters, can give overtones of the ritualistic and the archetypal.

THE ATTIC in Relation to Previous Works

THE ATTIC is an outgrowth of the three plays

reviewed. The nature of human contact is again probed in terms of the facets discussed in the previous section.

A young man, Jeff, rents an attic apartment from an elderly couple, Bill and Betty Linton. Although he has little in common with them, he is drawn into becoming a confidant to both. He is exposed to a complex relationship, formed over the period of a long marriage--a relationship for which he is unable to decipher what is real and what is imaginary. Betty claims she had a child forty years previous. Bill confides to Jeff that there was no child: it was a mistaken pregnancy, a tumour. Bill's account of sexual advances made by a girl who formerly rented the apartment is brought into doubt by Betty's denial of the girl's existence. The Lintons impose on Jeff more frequently and draw him deeper into their personal conflict. The transgression of his privacy is such that Jeff is prepared to abandon the apartment.

Unknown to Jeff, Jennie, the previous tenant of the attic suite, is living downstairs as part of the Linton household. She seeks him out where he works. She is invited to the apartment. To Jeff she is a visitor from the world outside the house. Jennie's approach to Jeff appears to be an elaborate sexual game. Once in the apartment, she inspects his possessions and learns as much as possible about him. She intrigues him to such a degree that he would like to see her again. As the intimacy between

the two grows, Jennie becomes more manipulating.

The morning Jeff is to move, the Lintons arrive and announce that a room has been built for Jeff on the main floor of the house. Jennie aids them in bringing Jeff downstairs.

As in BY THE SEA and SYLVIA, the encounter of the characters in THE ATTIC is often a sharing of fantasies rather than direct communication. As in SYLVIA, the instinctual forces provide the play with its dramatic thrust. The drama deals with a grotesque form of adoption. Betty's maternal instinct finds a goal in Jeff. The progression of the play is a movement toward the absorption of the young man by the household.

The Characters in THE ATTIC

Jeff

Jeff is the main character of the play. As with Cincinnatus in INVITATION TO A BEHEADING, he is the object of the dramatic action rather than the initiator. The dramatic thrust of the play is toward his assimilation by the other three characters.

It is Jennie who points out Jeff's predominant characteristic--the quality of a chameleon. He has sufficient adaptability to prove a sympathetic listener or confidant for a variety of people, including, of course, Betty, Bill, and Jennie. This characteristic is also his

weakness, the personality trait which will allow for his eventual absorption.

There is a progression within the character over the course of the play.

At the beginning, Jeff is sociable and polite with the Lintons. He is willing to listen to their problems and complaints. He allows Betty to make lunches for him and runs the occasional errand for the Lintons. He agrees to talk to Betty on Bill's behalf.

His irritation at their infringement on his privacy begins in Scene Two of Act One. Betty remains in his apartment after he leaves for work. His annoyance grows with the surprise dinner party: he returns from work to find his apartment occupied. Out of kindness, he suggests they stay.

During the dinner party, Jeff is drawn deeper into Betty's fantasy of having had a child. He attempts to stop her recounting of the birth, to no avail. As the conflict between Betty and Bill reaches an open stage, Jeff finds himself a part of it. Out of sympathy, he relinquishes, in a sense, to Betty's fantasy in reassuring her that the photograph, which to her is proof of her pregnancy, is still intact. Betty takes Bill downstairs. Before she returns, Jeff flees the apartment to avoid any further involvement with the old couple.

At the beginning of Act Two comes Jeff's decision

to vacate the apartment. The sound of construction from somewhere in the interior of the house irritates him. Over the course of the opening scene of Act Two, Jennie uncovers a few things about Jeff, such as his chameleon nature and the privacy he demands. He is intrigued by Jennie and wishes to see her again.

In Scene Two of Act Two, Jeff's vexation at the Lintons' transgression of his privacy erupts into anger. He gives his notice without his customary politeness. He simply states the apartment is "not suitable".

In Scene Three of Act Two, Jeff enters his apartment loudly and bravely, arm in arm with Jennie whom he assumes to be a comrade. He stamps on the floor when the sound of construction begins. Several matters which have been preying on Jeff's mind come to the fore in the scene. Jeff imagines the interior of the house as a dark, musty dwelling. He angrily refuses to go downstairs with Jennie. He inquires as to what Bill is building on the main floor when Jennie returns.

In Scene Four of Act Two, Jeff wakes from a nightmare about an old woman. The dream springs from the Lintons' grotesque account of the mistaken pregnancy and is reflective of Jeff's vague fears about the couple and his involvement in their situation. When the Lintons arrive, he looks to Jennie for support. As Jennie and the Lintons join together, Jeff retreats into himself and protests weakly

when Jennie takes him downstairs.

Jennie

Jennie, as described in the play, is an intense, attractive woman in her mid-twenties. Her predominant characteristic is her ambivalence toward men. They are both knights in shining armour and pigs. This ambivalence is voiced by Jennie in Scene Two of Act One. It finds its dramatic expression in her encounter with Jeff in Act Two.

Her invasion of Jeff's apartment is an elaborate manoeuver with an emphasis on sexual tactics. In Scene One of Act Two, Jennie is sexually enticing, inquisitive, sympathetic, and, above all, manipulating. She has intrigued Jeff sufficiently that he requests to see her again as she is about to leave.

By the time of her second visit to the apartment, her intimate infiltration into Jeff's life has spread. Jeff appears to trust her. Her control of Jeff builds. The manipulation is of a crueller sort as in Jennie's game of wanting to see the main floor of the house and that of the sexual arousal and frustration of Jeff. Her power over Jeff finds its ultimate expression in the persuasion of him to go downstairs at the end of the play.

Betty Linton

Betty is an embodiment of the maternal instinct. Her obsessive fantasy concerning the child she bore

is something to which she clings with a tenacity that defies any of Bill's efforts to confront her with the truth. Her resentment toward Bill for his part in the removal of "the child" is channelled into veiled complaints and martyred tones as to what she must endure from Bill. She shows Bill little in the way of physical or emotional responses.

In keeping with her maternal drive, Betty is engrossed in the tasks of feeding people and caring for them and in domestic duties, such as washing up and making beds.

Her obsession for a child finds its realization in "the adoption" of Jeff at the end of the play.

Bill Linton

Like Harry in BY THE SEA, Bill is unable to control his wife and her obsession. Betty provides Bill with very little in the way of understanding or physical response. In Bill, there is an element of sexual frustration which finds an outlet in the sensuousness of his work and sexual fantasies.

In Scene Three of Act One, he attempts to confront Betty with the truth about "the child". His efforts end in an apology to Betty. He kneels at her feet. He is subjugated to her to a degree. The building of the room for Jeff could be interpreted as an act of expiation on Bill's part for his supposed complicity in the loss of Betty's child.

Dramatic Structure of THE ATTIC

The most important dramatic element within the

framework of the play is that of suspense.

In Act One, the audience is given a number of conflicting stories to unravel. There is the question of the child. Is it real or imaginary? The existence of the girl is called into doubt when Betty denies that the apartment had been rented before. Jeff has no sooner left the suite when Jennie, the former tenant, appears. Jeff is not discussed directly by Betty and Jennie, but Jennie's interest in him is evident. The audience is prepared for a possible meeting of the two.

Another important aspect in building and maintaining the suspense throughout the play is the repeated sound of construction. It is introduced in Scene Two of Act One. Betty refers to what is being built as "a surprise". The sound grows more insistent and acquires dramatic focus in Act Two. It is given added emphasis when Jeff shows a preoccupation with it: he inquires as to what Bill is building upon Jennie's return from downstairs.

The suspense is heightened in Act Two through the sudden appearance of Jennie, not as a member of the household, but supposedly as a visitor from the outside world. Jennie seems to be there for a purpose. As the relationship between Jeff and Jennie grows more intimate over the course of the act, Jeff becomes more vulnerable to her designs, whatever they may be.

Another issue for the audience is, of course, Jeff's

proposed departure. He tells Jennie in Scene One of Act Two that he will be moving shortly. Each scene after the opening one is a progression toward his leaving--the notice given to Betty, the celebration of his last night in the apartment, the packing the following morning. In counterpoint to Jeff's possible vacating of the apartment is his growing involvement with a person, who, unknown to him, is living in the same house.

The various factors contributing to the suspense--the mysterious hammering, the infiltration of Jennie, the planned departure of Jeff--intersect in the final scene. What was being built is a room for Jeff. Jennie supports the Lintons and escorts Jeff downstairs.

There is an element of the ritualistic in the play, as well. Betty's first entrance, as described in the stage directions, contains a hint of the ceremonial. Jennie's actions take the form of a rite in Scene Three of Act Two as she prepares Jeff for bed. The sexual intercourse is to involve a little blood. Jennie refers to it as "a tiny baptism". It is the eve of Jeff's adoption by the family. There is also the primitive belief of intercourse with a menstruating woman having a weakening effect upon the male.

Another important aspect of the primitive element of the play is to be found in the importance attached to objects by the characters. In primitive thought, possessions are associated closely with their owner and viewed as almost

an extension of the person, himself.

Jeff's collections of rocks and books are, seemingly, a manifestation of what he holds private, the part of himself which he witholds from others. They serve as a retreat for Jeff in the face of anything disturbing. The act of Jeff's giving Jennie a stone in Act Two is paralleled by the foothold of intimacy she has achieved.

The photograph of Betty, taken during her "pregnancy", is, to her, support of the validity of her obsession. After Bill has crumpled the photograph, Betty is afraid that she cannot be recognized as the woman in the picture.

Bill relates to the furniture he builds in a sensual manner. When he speaks of women in a sexual fashion, he uses comparisons involving the materials with which he works.

In Scene Two of Act One, Jennie does not talk directly to Betty about Jeff. She alludes to the condition of the bed he has recently left. She inspects his possessions. She plays with one of the rocks as she recounts a sexual escapade. She vents her anger with men by hurling the rock.

Another structural element of importance is the use of parallel male-female relationships. Betty's control of Bill is echoed in Jennie's eventual control of Jeff.

It is difficult to give a completely intellectual analysis to a play which is not realistic in nature. However, I have touched upon most of the important thematic and

structural elements to be found within THE ATTIC. Any dramatic weaknesses of the script may hopefully be uncovered and remedied over the course of its first production.

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

(in the order of their appearance)

JEFF

BILL LINTON

BETTY LINTON

JENNIE

ACT ONE

Scene One

A sparsely furnished, attic bachelor suite. Noon of a spring day. Stage right is a door to an exterior staircase. The door is opened: a shaft of sunlight penetrates the adjoining kitchenette area which contains an arborite table, with two matching chrome chairs, and a small sink, refrigerator, and stove. Up right is a jutting cubical structure--the bathroom. The angular, slanting upstage wall gives a touch of confinement to the room at variance with its largeness. Evenly spaced along the wall are two niches with tall, narrow windows of a divided-pane design.

In the upstage left corner of the room is a storage bin, a cubical structure of three-foot dimension. Along the stage-left wall is a doorway to the interior of the house. A dark-stained, mirrored chest of drawers of a dated, ornate design

has been moved in front of the door, blocking its use. JEFF, a casually dressed man in his mid-twenties, is in the process of rearranging furniture. He has a slight build, dark hair, and even, sensitive features. As the curtain rises, he is found, standing at the foot of a single bed, with his back to the audience. He stoops and pushes the bed upstage centre to the section of wall between the two window niches. Stage right of the bed is a night table and lamp; stage left, a small, newly varnished bookcase, containing about two dozen books which have the appearance of having been read and reread. A half-dozen stones of varying shapes, sizes, and colours have been placed on top of the bookcase. At the upstage corner of storage bin and wall is a small armchair with a slipcover of a floral design. After completing his task, JEFF turns and sits at the foot of the bed. He looks about and appears satisfied

with the balanced arrangement he has given the room. His attention is drawn to two empty suitcases and a cardboard box on the floor. He collects them and moves to the storage bin. The bin has a small latched door, facing downstage. He opens it, only to find the bin filled. He empties it, pulling out three boxes and an old baby carriage. The rusting carriage has large spoked wheels of the style of a few decades ago. JEFF hesitates, then opens one of the boxes. It contains articles of baby clothing of the same period as the carriage. The clothing is yellowed with age.

The interior door rattles as someone attempts to enter the apartment but cannot because of the obstructing chest of drawers. JEFF quickly returns an article of clothing to the box he has opened, and reseals it. He goes to the interior door. The person appears to have gone away; there is no further sound. Indecisive, JEFF stands in front of

the chest of drawers. His reflection is caught in its mirror.

JEFF turns suddenly with the sound of footsteps on the exterior stairs. BILL LINTON enters. He is a gruff man in his early sixties, balding, a little paunchy, but still muscular. He has the stature and bearing of a man who has worked with his hands from an early age. BILL gives JEFF a slight nod of acknowledgement as he moves directly to the chest of drawers. He pushes it to the side of the doorway. He opens the door and steps aside.

Both men are positioned accidently on either side of the doorway, providing a strange touch of attendants at a palace entrance. This hint of the ceremonial is accentuated by BETTY LINTON who enters slowly, bearing in both hands, a steaming, white casserole dish and two folded sheets, one draped over each arm.

Apart from the bizarre air these accessories give her, BETTY is rather ordinary: small in stature, slightly

overweight, late fifties in age. A lack of attention to her appearance--no make-up, a drab housedress, no identifiable hairstyle--makes her seem older than she is. BETTY moves, without pausing, through the room to the kitchenette area where she places the casserole dish on the table. She turns to JEFF, clasping her hands, with the sheets still draped over her arms.

BETTY

I hope you don't mind.

JEFF

Mind?

BETTY

That door.

JEFF

It's got to be left open. The outside stairs are too steep.

BETTY

It's the veins.

BILL

You still got a good pair of legs on you. (To JEFF) Hasn't she?

JEFF

(Politely) Why, yes.

(Embarrassed, BETTY goes to the bed with the sheets).

BETTY

Don't mind him. Once he starts talking silly.

BILL
(Winking at JEFF) First thing I noticed about her.

BETTY
(Reprovingly) Bill . . .

BILL
Maybe I said eyes when I was younger and didn't speak my mind. But it was legs. Always legs.

(For the first time, BETTY'S attention shifts to the boxes and carriage which have been removed from the bin. She forgets entirely about making the bed and moves to the bin excitedly. BILL realizes the bin has been emptied).

BETTY
You told me you threw it all away.

BILL
(To JEFF, sharply) If you wanted to use that, why didn't you ask me?

JEFF
I'm sorry but I thought it was empty.

BILL
If you asked, I'd have cleared it out.

(BILL moves to the bin where BETTY is is sitting, fondling an article of clothing. She pauses, looking up at him apprehensively. He takes it away from her gently and puts it back, resealing the box. He picks up the box and moves in the direction of the interior door).

BETTY
Bill . . .

BILL

What?

(BETTY says nothing).

I meant to throw it out long ago.

(BILL exits. BETTY moves away from the bin. As she talks to JEFF, she attempts to dispel some preoccupation of her own. She avoids looking in the direction of the bin).

BETTY

You've changed the furniture around.

(BETTY moves to the bed and continues making it).

JEFF

I hope you don't mind my rearranging things.

BETTY

No, of course not. It's your place now, isn't it? I hope the rent isn't too steep. I thought Bill was asking too much but you can never tell that man anything.

JEFF

No, it's about what I wanted to pay.

BETTY

Oh, God! That food will be cold.

(BETTY hurries to the kitchenette area and checks the casserole).

It's not bad, but you better eat it right away. I hope you're hungry.

JEFF

You shouldn't have bothered, Mrs. Linton.

BETTY

(Pleased) I just thought you wouldn't have time to make something, with moving in and everything.

(BETTY opens a cupboard and takes out a plate on which she serves some of the casserole. JEFF crosses to the kitchen table and sits).

JEFF

It looks very good. I like stew.

BETTY

It's not supposed to be. I'm afraid it didn't turn out quite right.

JEFF

(Sampling it) No, it's fine.

BETTY

You don't have to be polite. I won't be offended if you don't eat it.

JEFF

I like it. Honestly.

BETTY

Really? I've gotten so used to my own cooking, I can't tell anymore. It all tastes the same, even when it doesn't turn out.

JEFF

Judging from this, I'd say you were a good cook.

BETTY

I'm not, I'm afraid. But then Bill gives me very little encouragement. He'll eat anything, you know.

JEFF

Mr. Linton has retired, has he?

BETTY

Three years now. He was a cabinet maker. But he's kept himself busy since then.

JEFF

A hobby?

BETTY

I guess you could call it that. He still makes furniture. In a workshop in the basement. He can't seem to stop.

JEFF

He sells it, does he?

BETTY

It would be wonderful if he did. But I can't suggest . . . "I'm a builder, not a salesman," he says. No. He wraps it in brown paper and brings it upstairs for me.

JEFF

A present?

BETTY

It's hard to act surprised. It's been end tables the last three times. I haven't the heart to tell the man we've got enough.

(BILL enters and collects another box. BETTY watches him closely. He carries it to the interior door).

(Pleadingly) Bill, I'm sure I can find room for that downstairs.

BILL

You know there's no room downstairs.

(BILL exits. BETTY turns her attention to JEFF in an attempt to distract herself).

BETTY

Let me get you some more.

JEFF

No, thank you.

BETTY

But you do like it?

JEFF

Yes.

(BETTY puts the casserole in the refrigerator).

BETTY

I'll just leave this for you. It's nice hearing whether it turned out or not. Thank you. Bill never says anything. He's not much help when it comes to that.

(BETTY returns to the table and sits. Her focus drifts to the baby carriage and the remaining box).

BETTY
He's right, I suppose. There's no room downstairs. He keeps making more furniture. It takes all of my time just changing things around so there's a place for the new pieces.

JEFF
Perhaps, it's good that he has something to occupy his time.

BETTY
I suppose.

(There is a pause in which BETTY'S attention drifts to the remaining contents of the bin).

I had only one.

JEFF
I beg your pardon?

BETTY
(Smiling) Just the one. I wanted more, but I couldn't after the first. That was forty years ago but it seems like yesterday.

JEFF
I suppose because it was a happy time for you.

BETTY
Not at first. Bill was upset. But after a while he was O.K. We were like two kids with a secret. We'd buy things for the baby and hide them so our parents wouldn't know. (Laughing) Bill was worse than me and he was older. You men, you're just kids at heart.

JEFF
I guess we are.

BETTY
So we moved here without telling anyone because of the situation. Bill had his trade and he was doing well. He'd bought this house with the money he'd saved. I was a sight. I just kept getting bigger and bigger. (Laughing) First we thought twins, then triplets, then you know what Bill said?

JEFF
What?

BETTY
It had to be an elephant.

(BETTY laughs and JEFF does as well).

JEFF

It wasn't, was it?

BETTY

We had no doctor of our own. Bill found one in the middle of the night. A nice man. They made house calls in those days.

JEFF

Was it a boy or a girl?

BETTY

What?

JEFF

The baby?

BETTY

They said it died. Bill and the doctor.

JEFF

I'm sorry.

BETTY

That's all right.

JEFF

(Looking at the bin) I must have reminded you by . . .

BETTY

You couldn't know. . . . I'll tell you something.

JEFF

Yes?

BETTY

It doesn't upset me.

(BETTY pulls her chair closer to JEFF).

You see I don't think it did.

JEFF

(Uneasily) Oh?

BETTY

There was something wrong with it, you see. That's why they wouldn't give it to me. I told them I knew and I didn't mind if it wasn't perfect. (Tearfully) I'd still like to take care of it.

JEFF
(With concern) Mrs. Linton.

BETTY
(Bitterly) Bill must've been the one who decided to give it away.

JEFF
I'm sure he wouldn't do that without your permission.

BETTY
He had no right to, did he? It wasn't a part of him. It hadn't been growing inside him all those . . .

(BILL enters. BETTY breaks away from JEFF).

I'll change the sheets once a week.

JEFF
There's no need, thank you. I have my own.

BETTY
I'd like to.

JEFF
But you have difficulty with the stairs.

(BETTY moves gradually towards the bin, as if drawn to it, unaware of her own movement).

BETTY
I can manage if I can use the inside ones.

(BETTY turns to BILL as he puts the remaining box in the carriage. She gives her attention to JEFF again as if in an attempt to distract herself).

Lunches to take to work. I could make lunches too.

JEFF
The library has a cafeteria.

BETTY
It wouldn't be as expensive.

JEFF

Thank you but I usually eat in the cafeteria.

(BILL pushes the creaking carriage to the entrance and exits. It can be heard bumping down the stairs. BETTY is drawn to the interior door. She turns to JEFF with a parting remark).

BETTY

Well, I hope you'll be comfortable here.

(BETTY exits. JEFF stores the suitcases and the box in the bin. He appears ill at ease. He goes to the interior door and closes it. He moves to the bookcase, selects a book, and sits on the bed to read. BILL enters, without knocking. He carries some sandpaper and an old cloth. He moves to the bookcase).

BILL

I haven't finished with that.

JEFF

The bookcase?

BILL

Have to paper the top down a bit.

(JEFF removes the half-dozen stones from the top of the bookcase).

What are those for?

JEFF

Nothing.

BILL

Must be for something.

JEFF
(Handing a stone to BILL) I just like them.

BILL
It's nice to the touch.

JEFF
Yes. I suppose you'd develop that, working with your hands.

BILL
Feel the top of this.

(JEFF hesitates).

Go ahead.

(JEFF runs his hand across the top of the bookcase).

Well?

JEFF
A bit rough, isn't it?

BILL
Exactly. The varnish will do it every time. It raises the grain.

(BILL sandpapers a section of the surface lightly).

Now try it.

JEFF
It's smooth.

BILL
Like skin. Thats what I do once I'm finished. Just to check. Run my fingers over the whole thing.

(BILL'S fingers move to the corner joint of the bookcase, tracing gently along it).

How's this for a little beauty. Know how I did that?

JEFF
No.

BILL
Look close.

(JEFF does so).

Well?

JEFF

I suppose the boards were cut at an angle then glued together.

(BILL brings his fist down hard on the bookcase. JEFF jumps a little).

BILL

There's your answer. We'd have a pile of lumber now if it was joined that way. Let the wood shrink for a couple of months and it'd fall apart on its own. Want to know the secret?

JEFF

(Appearing interested) Yes.

BILL

(Slowly) Mitred dovetail joint.

JEFF

I see.

BILL

Some'll tell you it's too fancy for a bookcase. Open or overlapping dovetail be more than enough. But I believe in the best.

JEFF

That's a good approach.

BILL

(Mellowing) I think so.

JEFF

Mitred dovetail joint?

BILL

That's right. Have you been interested in cabinet making long?

JEFF

No. . . . So you've made all this furniture?

BILL

(Proudly) Every stick. Retired or not, I haven't slowed down. I'm fit as a fiddle except for my heart condition.

JEFF

It's very fine work.

BILL

Not bad.

(Pause).

And you've read all them books?

JEFF

Yes.

BILL

Any books on animals?

JEFF

Those are mostly novels but I have read some books about animals.

BILL

There's this question that's bothered me for a long time. Maybe you can answer it for me.

JEFF

I can certainly try.

BILL

Why do they have to suffer?

JEFF

Animals?

BILL

It's easy to see with people. After the things they do. But animals don't know any better. (With a genuine puzzlement). Why would God make them suffer too?

JEFF

Well . . . I suppose they need nervous systems in order to stay alive and . . . and that means they're capable of experiencing pain.

BILL

They could've been made another way.

JEFF

I suppose so.

BILL

With no nerves.

JEFF

Yes.

BILL

Know why they weren't?

JEFF

No.

BILL

(Sadly) That's too bad.

(A slight pause).

You don't mind me doing this now.

JEFF

Oh, no.

BILL

Might as well finish this up now as later.

JEFF

Yes.

BILL

Didn't want to stay down there anyway.

JEFF

Oh.

BILL

"Just one box," she says. "No" is what I should've said. I'm getting old. Can't be as firm as I used to be. And she doesn't change. You know how it is.

JEFF

I suppose so.

BILL

It's good to have another man to talk to.

(BILL glances at the opened interior door).

I'll show you something you'll appreciate.

(BILL gets up and closes the door).

But not a word to Betty. You know the way women are.

(BILL pulls out his wallet and extracts something hidden in the lining. He

unfolds it. It is a picture from a pornographic magazine).

Bill
You don't embarrass easily, do you?

JEFF
No.

(BILL hands JEFF the picture).

BILL
(Laughing bawdily) Can you imagine, shaving it like that? Looks like a knothole in a piece of pine.

(JEFF laughs uncomfortably and hands it back to BILL who puts it away carefully in his wallet).

Wonder what kind of a woman would let them take a picture like that?

JEFF
Maybe she needed the money.

BILL
(Laughing) That's something Betty would say. She always thinks the best. . . . It's like when the girl was living up here.

JEFF
I didn't think you'd rented this before.

BILL
Just the once. A real little winner, that one. No parties, mind you. She took them one at a time. I lost count myself. All Betty said was "She's just lonely." (Confidingly) Can you keep a secret?

JEFF
Yes.

BILL
Not a word to her?

JEFF
Right.

BILL
She tried to get me one time.

JEFF

The girl?

BILL

She called me up here. Said her tap was dripping. I'll bet it was. She was standing over there by that window. All of a sudden she says, "Look at that funny old man going down the street." So I go to take a look. I enjoy a joke as much as the next one. Then she moves behind me, shoving herself up against my back.

JEFF

(Suppressing a smile) Perhaps it was just in fun.

BILL

It was no joke. "Do you see him?" she says, and I could feel her nipples go hard against my back. And you know what, to top it all off?

JEFF

What?

BILL

There wasn't no old man on the street.

JEFF

What did you do?

BILL

I told her. She wasn't gonna get me that way. "I got a wife," I told her. "A real saint. A man couldn't ask for more." Betty would've been proud. . . . She's sorting them clothes out to wash. What's the use of that, I said. But she went ahead anyway . . . humming to herself. Moving around like her legs didn't trouble her.

JEFF

I'm sorry.

BILL

Eh?

JEFF

(Indicating the bin) I didn't realize . . .

BILL

You're not to blame. I took the lock off yesterday. I didn't get around to cleaning it out. . . . She likes you.

JEFF

Mrs. Linton?

BILL
I can tell.

JEFF
That's nice.

BILL
Do you think you could talk to her?

JEFF
About what?

BILL
Throwing them things out.

JEFF
I could try.

BILL
She talked to you, didn't she?

JEFF
Yes.

BILL
What did she say?

JEFF
(Hesitantly) That it died.

BILL
That's not the story she tells.

JEFF
Well . . . she thinks it was born with some defect and . . . had to be given away.

BILL
It wasn't.

JEFF
It died?

BILL
It wasn't no baby.

JEFF
Oh.

BILL
How could it be? I never touched her.

JEFF

I see.

BILL

I know what you're thinking.

JEFF

Pardon?

BILL

If I didn't touch her, some other fella must've.

JEFF

No!

BILL

I don't blame you. I couldn't help suspecting that myself. But it don't take no man for what was inside her.

(BILL moves closer to JEFF, holding up his hand).

A growth the size of my fist. It caused her to miss her periods. She swelled up. It even took about nine months.

JEFF

But surely the doctor explained to her.

BILL

It did no good. She was sure, you see. The doctor never seen anything like it. She passed it the same way as a baby. . . You'll talk to her?

JEFF

What?

BILL

Throwing them things away.

JEFF

Yes.

BILL

It makes her happy to be able to do things for people. She ask you about lunches?

JEFF

Tell her she can.

BILL

That'll help take her mind off things.

JEFF
I'll pay you for them. The lunches.

BILL
Forget it. . . . There's something you could do though. Like in exchange.

JEFF
Yes?

BILL
We don't go out much anymore. You never know who you're gonna meet on the street with things the way they are these days. Outside the house.

JEFF
That's true.

BILL
You can get almost everything delivered. It's just a few things that have to be picked up.

JEFF
You'd like me to . . .

BILL
Just a few things.

JEFF
I could certainly do that.

BILL
Once or twice a week, maybe.

JEFF
Sure.

BILL
Good. (Going to the interior door) I'll tell Betty about the lunches. She'll be pleased.

(BILL exits. Fade out).

Scene Two

Early morning of the following day. A grey light from the two windows filters through the apartment. A strip of yellow light can be seen at the bottom of the closed bathroom door. The sound of water running in the sink in the bathroom can be heard. An electric kettle on the counter in the kitchenette area has been plugged in.

There is a faint timid knock at the interior door. BETTY enters the room. She is wearing a long, frayed housecoat and carries a large brown paper bag. As she closes the door, a rhythmic sound of hammering begins --a regular, muffled thudding from somewhere in the interior of the house. JEFF emerges from the bathroom, dressed to leave. He is wearing a sportscoat and tie.

BETTY

Jeff.

(JEFF starts a little).

I hope you don't mind if I call you Jeff.

JEFF

No, of course not.

BETTY

Bill told me you'd changed your mind.

JEFF

Pardon?

(BETTY extends the lunch to him).

Oh yes, I did. (Taking it) Thank you.

BETTY

I only hope you like it.

(JEFF stands, holding the lunch, momentarily. BETTY stares at him with a fixed, maternal smile).

JEFF

I was going to have a cup of coffee. Would you like one?

BETTY

(Suddenly activated) I'll see to it. You sit down.

(BETTY bustles about the kitchenette. The subdued sound of hammering continues).

JEFF

Mr. Linton's up early.

BETTY

Half past six every morning. And he watches the clock. At exactly eight, he finds something to do. When you've worked forty years at one job, I guess it's hard to change.

JEFF

Mrs. Linton, I'd like to apologize for what happened yesterday.

BETTY

Apologize?

JEFF

The bin.

BETTY

That was no fault of yours.

JEFF

I didn't mean to have you reminded of . . . I'd feel better if you let Mr. Linton throw everything away.

BETTY

He has.

JEFF

Everything?

BETTY

We had a nice talk.

(There is a pause, filled with the thudding).

JEFF

Mr. Linton's building something, is he?

BETTY

Yes.

JEFF

In the basement?

BETTY

On the main floor.

JEFF

Furniture?

BETTY

I shouldn't say but it's a surprise.

JEFF

Oh.

BETTY

(Changing the subject) I wasn't sure what you'd like.

JEFF

What?

BETTY

So I made two. Egg salad and ham.

JEFF

I like both.

BETTY

(Pleased) I thought you might. I'm good at guessing things about people. I'll bet you're a person who likes to keep to himself.

JEFF
Yes.

BETTY
And a banana and an apple and an orange. I wasn't as sure about that.

JEFF
The orange is fine. I'll just give you back the rest.

BETTY
(Stopping him) No. Take everything, please. That's what I said to Bill. He's not the kind of boy who'll throw a party every night though I'm sure he has more friends than he can count.

JEFF
I do know a lot of people but I prefer visiting them.

BETTY
And your parents? They don't live in the city?

JEFF
They died a few years ago.

BETTY
At the same time?

JEFF
An accident.

BETTY
An orphan.

JEFF
(Laughing) I don't think the term applies to someone who is twenty-five, Mrs. Linton.

BETTY
I suppose you're right.

(She sips her coffee).

My, but it's nice having someone living here.

JEFF
Has it been a long time since you've rented the attic?

BETTY
It's the first time.

JEFF
I thought there was someone before me.

BETTY

(Uneasily) Oh?

JEFF

A girl.

BETTY

No.

JEFF

I must be mistaken then. Mr. Linton mentioned . . .

BETTY

(Quickly) He loves stories. Telling them. I meant to warn you. I should say something to him, poor Bill, but I haven't the heart. He enjoys them so much.

JEFF

(Coolly) I see.

BETTY

(Placatingly) It's not like he lies. I hope you're not offended.

JEFF

No. It's just that it bothers me when people . . . Well, I better be on my way or I'll be late.

BETTY

Bill said you wouldn't mind picking up a few things.

JEFF

Oh, yes.

(BETTY takes a small piece of paper from the pocket of her housecoat).

BETTY

Just a few things. All my groceries are delivered. Course they make mistakes sometimes. I don't bother sending the wrong things back. I got some dog biscuits last week.

JEFF

You kept them?

BETTY

I've always wanted a dog.

JEFF

Oh.

BETTY
But they chew furniture, Bill says.

JEFF
(Taking the list) I'll be home about six.

BETTY
Just bring it here. Bill will be up to collect it.

JEFF
(Rising) Well, I should be going.

BETTY
(Smiling) Have a good day.

(JEFF hesitates a moment. BETTY suddenly realizes why he has not left. The hammering ceases).

Oh, I'll just wash out these cups.

JEFF
(A little irritated) That's not necessary.

BETTY
I'd like to.

(JEFF goes to the exterior door).

You won't mention anything to Bill.

(JEFF turns to BETTY).

About the stories. It would only upset him.

(JEFF opens the door to leave).

Don't worry.

JEFF
What?

BETTY
I'll lock up.

(JEFF exits. BETTY sits, sipping her coffee. JENNIE casually enters the apartment through the interior door. She is in her mid-twenties. Her attractive, even-featured

face bears marks of intensity and intelligence. Her hair is uncombed and she wears no make-up. A clinging silk dressing gown reveals a good figure. JENNIE moves about the room, examining JEFF'S possessions).

BETTY
(Apprehensively) Jennie . . .

(JENNIE picks up a stone from the top of the bookcase. She sits on the bed, tossing it playfully into the air).

JENNIE
What?

BETTY
That isn't polite.

JENNIE
I had to get out. Bill was driving me crazy with that hammering. Anyway, what are you still doing up here?

BETTY
Just finishing my coffee.

JENNIE
What else were you going to do?

BETTY
Nothing.

JENNIE
What about the bed?

BETTY
The bed?

JENNIE
Were you going to make it?

BETTY
I guess I will.

JENNIE
Unmade beds are interesting. A peaceful night. A restless night. A person tends to sleep on a particular side. You see it's the right.

BETTY
I'm sure I wouldn't have noticed.

(BETTY takes the cups to the sink. JENNIE lies back on the bed, fondling the stone).

JENNIE
I'd be more likely to. I'm a little more familiar with this bed.

BETTY
Jennie, I think you should be . . .

JENNIE
(Ignoring her) How long was I here? Six months?

BETTY
That's all behind you now.

JENNIE
Six incredible months. (Laughing) The queue forming down the outside stairs. Round the block. All those knights in shining armour. I used to imagine if I rolled out of the way, there'd be a parade.

BETTY
(Embarrassed) You're worse than Bill with his stories.

JENNIE
Did I ever tell you about the little man who took off everything but his horn-rimmed glasses. He held on to his briefcase, as well. He thought I had the most sensuous feet in the city.

BETTY
(Moving to the bed) It's time we were getting back downstairs, Jennie.

JENNIE
Very polite. He said, "May I?" before he slipped off one of my shoes. Extremely polite. And . . . and then he . . .

BETTY
(Pleadingly) Jennie, please.

JENNIE
I had to throw the shoe away after.

BETTY

Jennie!

JENNIE

Pigs!

(JENNIE hurls the stone into the kitchen-ette area where it clatters on the tiles).

A herd of pigs. Shoving their way up the stairs. Grunting. Smelling. My legs up in a V like a trough.

(JENNIE buries her head in the pillow. BETTY collects the stone and wipes it off with a handkerchief from a pocket of her housecoat. She returns it to the bookcase and then sits on the edge of the bed).

BETTY

(Soothingly) Jennie . . .

JENNIE

What?

BETTY

Have you had your breakfast?

JENNIE

. . . No . . .

BETTY

Help me make the bed and then I'll fix you something nice.

(JENNIE gets up and they proceed to make the bed).

JENNIE

(Mischievously) I made Bill bang his thumb with a hammer.

BETTY

Poor Bill.

JENNIE

(Laughing) I just came out of the bathroom doing up my robe.

BETTY

Jennie, you shouldn't tease him.

JENNIE

He <u>is</u> funny. I hear him sometimes at night.

BETTY

Oh.

JENNIE

Calling to you.

BETTY

I must be asleep.

JENNIE

Like a little boy.

BETTY

Oh, they're just kids at heart.

(JENNIE and BETTY laugh).

Come. It's time you had your breakfast.

(They exit. Blackout).

Scene Three

Early evening. Two weeks later. A grey half-light from the two windows fills the apartment. BILL enters through the interior door. He is carrying a chair and a half-empty bottle of whiskey. BETTY follows, carrying a tray on which have been placed a casserole, an odd, malformed cake, and place settings for three.

BILL moves the table to the centre of the room and arranges the three chairs about it. BETTY sets the table. They complete their tasks in silence, then sit at opposite ends of the table, not looking at each other. After a brief pause, the rattle of a key in the exterior door is heard. JEFF enters. He pauses as he sees the figures in the dim light. He switches on the over-head light--an action which appears to activate BILL and BETTY. BILL pours himself a drink. BETTY turns to JEFF and smiles.

BETTY

Did you have a good day?

(JEFF does not reply. He remains in the kitchenette area, completely taken aback at finding his apartment occupied).

BILL

(A little drunkenly) Have a drink.

(BILL pours a large drink for JEFF).

BETTY

(Checking the casserole) It's still good and hot. I counted on you being on time.

BILL

Regular as clockwork.

BETTY

(Teasingly) You are, you know. Middle of the week, quarter to six on the dot, we hear you go up the outside stairs.

(JEFF moves to the table but does not sit).

BILL

Here's your drink.

BETTY

What's the first thing you do when you get home?

JEFF

(Coolly) I wouldn't know.

BETTY

A cup of coffee. It's funny how I can make out sounds so easily after a couple of weeks. There's the tap running, and then a little later the kettle boils. I always turn to Bill and say, "It's a cup of coffee."

BILL

(Taking the casserole and serving himself) I'm hungry.

BETTY

You have a right to be. He's been working so hard lately.

(JEFF looks unbelievingly from one to the other. BETTY gives a little laugh of embarrassment).

BETTY

Oh Bill, we're terrible.

BILL

Eh?

BETTY

We haven't explained to Jeff what we're doing here.

BILL

(Offhandedly) It's a surprise.

JEFF

I'm sorry, but I was planning to go out.

BETTY

You don't usually in the middle of the week.

JEFF

Well I am today.

BETTY

(Disappointed) Oh.

JEFF

If you had told me . . .

BETTY

We thought it'd be nice. A surprise.

BILL

(Through a mouthful of food) It's good.

BETTY

Bill.

BILL

Eh?

(BETTY attempts to take BILL'S plate away. He clings to it).

(Irritated) Hey. I haven't finished.

JEFF

Mrs. Linton . . .

BETTY

Yes?

JEFF

Perhaps, I could go out later.

BETTY
Are you sure?

JEFF
(Sitting) Yes.

BETTY
I just thought a homecooked meal would be nice. (Indicating the cupboards) I noticed you eat a lot of canned food.

BILL
(Eating) It's very good.

BETTY
(Proudly) Well, it must be for you to notice. I did follow the recipe closely. Except for the cake. Something always goes wrong.

BILL
Looks O.K. to me.

BETTY
(Sadly) That's because I've baked them that way before, Bill.

BILL
Didn't marry you for your cooking anyway.

BETTY
(With a resigned laugh) It's a good thing you didn't.

BILL
(Winking at JEFF) She was a good-looking woman.

BETTY
We made a nice couple when we were young.

BILL
You're still good-looking. (To JEFF) Isn't she?

JEFF
(Politely) Yes.

BETTY
Oh, not at my age. But everyone use to say we made a nice couple. We'd drop in on Bill's relatives and mine. We were always welcomed. Of course, we had to leave all that behind because of the situation.

BILL
Betty . . .

BETTY

Yes?

BILL

You gonna give the boy some food?

BETTY

Excuse me.

(She serves some of the casserole).

BILL

You ever go out for a few with the gang after work?

JEFF

Occasionally.

BILL

Try the Lido. I liked to do that when I was working. That's where we used to go. They have an early show. A black girl. She dances. (Chuckling) If you can call it that. I told you about that, Betty.

BETTY

Yes, Bill.

BILL

One thing I'll bet I didn't tell you. (Laughing) This one time she came right down off the stage. Smack into my lap. Skin like mahogany. With nothing but her gold high heels. One in each hand.

BETTY

That's nice.

BILL

What do you think I did?

BETTY

I wouldn't know, Bill. (Rising, to JEFF) Excuse me.

BILL

I couldn't help it with that black lady sitting naked in my lap.

BETTY

(To JEFF) I think they deserve to be treated like white people.

(BETTY goes to the interior door).

BILL

Where are you going?

BETTY

I'll just be a minute.

BILL

(Laughing) Right smack in my lap.

(His laughter fades away).

She doesn't like to show it.

JEFF

What?

BILL

Betty.

JEFF

Oh.

BILL

A real saint. She's jealous, but she holds it back.

JEFF

Yes.

BILL

I wouldn't mind if she showed it now and then. . . . You don't mind us being here?

JEFF

No, it's all right.

BILL

She gets a kick out of it. If she had a pot big enough, she'd feed the whole country.

(Pause).

Have you thought about the animals?

JEFF

The animals? Oh, yes.

BILL

Any ideas?

JEFF

No.

BILL

Got another question for you.

JEFF

Yes?

BILL

Adam and Eve. What did they do to get kicked out of the garden?

JEFF

Supposedly, they disobeyed God.

BILL

By eating an apple?

JEFF

The apple wasn't important. It was the act of . . .

BILL

You're damned right it wasn't. You and me know it wasn't no apple. (Pensively) Although maybe it was under an apple tree.

(BETTY enters, carrying a photo album. She sits down at the table, leafing through it).

BETTY

What are you two men talking about?

JEFF

Adam and Eve.

BIll

(A little drunkenly) It wasn't no apple.

(BETTY holds the album up to JEFF. BILL becomes aware of it for the first time).

BETTY

We did make a nice couple. This was taken just before we eloped.

(BILL takes the album from her and puts it aside).

BILL

He doesn't want to see those. (Looking to JEFF for support) You don't, do you?

JEFF

Perhaps, some other time, Mrs. Linton.

BETTY
You like to read in the evenings, don't you?

JEFF
Yes.

BETTY
After you've had your supper, we never hear anything. I told Bill you must be reading. I enjoy it, too. But Bill doesn't like it when I do.

BILL
(Resentfully) If I wasn't here, you'd have time to read.

BETTY
Bill, don't be so touchy.

BILL
Once I'm dead, you'll have plenty of time.

BETTY
Now, Bill . . .

BILL
You can bring a book to my wake.

BETTY
Bill! (To JEFF) He's probably still hungry. He's irritable when he is.

(BETTY attempts to serve BILL'S plate).

BILL
(Stopping her) I don't want any more damned food.

BETTY
(To JEFF) You'll have a little more.

JEFF
No . . . no, thank you.

BETTY
Just a little.

JEFF
No, honestly.

BETTY
A speck.

(BETTY gives JEFF a generous portion).

BILL
She likes to feed people.

JEFF
Yes . . . Thank you.

BETTY
It's us who should thank you. It's a real evening out, isn't it, Bill?

BILL
(A little exasperated) Betty, we haven't even left the house.

BETTY
It doesn't seem like part of the house anymore. Now we can visit. Like before we were married. We used to enjoy that so . . .

BILL
Are we going to have that cake?

BETTY
Oh, yes. I'll just cut it on the side that turned out. After my mother and father had gone to bed, I waited an hour, just to be sure they were asleep. Then I packed my suitcases and waited at the gate. Bill was a little late.

(BILL says nothing. He picks up his glass and drinks).

I guess he can't remember. Just a half hour, mind you, but enough to make me nervous. I thought you didn't believe me, Bill.

BILL
(Drawn into the recollection) I showed up, didn't I?

BETTY
(Smiling) He drove an old Ford. The kind with a rumble seat. You could hear it miles down the road. Bill had come up here on his own a couple of weeks earlier and bought this house.

BILL
You were disappointed.

BETTY
I wasn't. It was beautiful then.

(BETTY takes the album, leafs through it, and shows JEFF).

BILL
You thought it was too small.

BETTY
I remember exactly what I said when I got out of the car, "Oh Bill, it's cozy."

BILL
It was the way you said it.

BETTY
(To JEFF) Besides, I find a small house easy to keep clean.

BILL
(Drunkenly) You never liked it.

BETTY
A garden. That's the only thing I ever mentioned. (To JEFF) Do you like flowers?

JEFF
Yes, I do.

BETTY
I do, too. But this land's mostly clay.

BILL
I was gonna get some top soil.

BETTY
I told him it was too much trouble. Just for a few flowers. I could easily do without.

(BILL rises with the empty bottle of whiskey and goes to the interior door).

(Apprehensively) Bill, I don't think we need any more.

(BILL exits, ignoring her).

It's his day off, you see.

JEFF
But he's retired.

BETTY
It used to be his day off. He worked Saturdays. So they gave him Wednesdays off.

JEFF
So now he doesn't make furniture on Wednesdays?

BETTY

That's right. I've tried to get him to change it. A day off in the middle of the week is bad, isn't it?

JEFF

There isn't a great deal to do.

BETTY

That's why he drinks.

(BETTY glances at the interior door. She extracts a photograph from a pocket in the back cover of the album. She holds it out to JEFF, who hesitates, then takes it).

Do you find it funny?

JEFF

It's you, isn't it?

BETTY

Standing by the house. I think it's funny. I'm such a size. (Laughing) You can't tell which is the house.

(JEFF hands it back, and BETTY becomes absorbed in the photograph).

He was right about the house. It was too small. You can get some idea from the size of this attic. And with a baby on the way.

JEFF

(Stirring uneasily) Mrs. Linton, I think it would be better if . . .

BETTY

We were like two kids. Bill was so excited. He put his hand here once, to feel the baby. When it moved, he pulled it away fast. Like he was frightened.

JEFF

(With concern) Mrs. Linton.

BETTY

He was even funnier later. Running out half-dressed to find a doctor. I was very calm myself. I put the things I'd need on the table beside the bed. Some diapers. A nightie. A blanket. Blue because I wanted a boy.

(Distressed, JEFF rises and moves away from the table, breaking BETTY'S pre-occupation with the photograph).

BETTY
Excuse me for rambling on like that.

JEFF
That's all right.

(BETTY puts the photograph into a pocket of her housedress).

BETTY
More cake?

JEFF
No, thank you.

BETTY
Just a sliver.

JEFF
(Returning to the table) All right.

BETTY
Poor Bill. Did you notice that his memory is not so good?

JEFF
Mrs. Linton, perhaps he just doesn't want to recall . . .

BETTY
No, he really forgets.

JEFF
(Attempting to change the subject) He's asked me all sorts of questions. He's interested in a variety of things.

BETTY
Life. The Bible. Politics. Especially when he's been drinking. I find if you say, "Yes, Bill," to everything, he falls asleep after a while. It hasn't been easy for me, mind you.

JEFF
Why?

BETTY
I don't agree with most of what he says.

(BILL is heard, mounting the interior stairs).

BETTY
Now if he starts any of his stories, do what I do.

JEFF
What?

BETTY
Humour him.

(BILL enters with a fresh bottle. BETTY rises and begins to collect the plates).

BILL
Sit down a minute. You're on your feet all day.

BETTY
When a meal's over, I like to clear things out of the way.

(BETTY takes the dishes to the kitchen sink and proceeds to wash them. BILL opens the fresh bottle and fills both glasses).

BILL
You don't drink much.

JEFF
Just a few now and then.

BETTY
What you call sociable drinking, Bill.

BILL
(Drinking) Well, I'll just finish this one to be social. Then me and Betty will sneak off. (Winking at JEFF) And have a little fun. You know what I mean?

BETTY
Bill! He talks so silly in front of company sometimes.

(BILL rises and sneaks towards BETTY drunkenly. He pinches her, then laughs bawdily).

BETTY
(Embarrassed) Bill!

BILL
Time for us to go.

BETTY
I'm sorry. He's worse than a kid.

BILL
I'll prove I'm no kid downstairs.

BETTY
A kid! I was just telling Jeff how funny you were when you had to go for the doctor.

BILL
(Sobering) What?

BETTY
Half-dressed. So excited.

(BILL moves away from her, going back to the table).

BILL
(To JEFF) Don't pay no attention.

BETTY
Poor Bill. He had to help the doctor through the whole thing. There was no one else. He almost fainted once . . .

BILL
Betty, he doesn't want to hear . . . Tell her you don't.

JEFF
Mrs. Linton . . .

(Ignoring both of them, BETTY continues her account with a gathering intensity).

BETTY
The doctor had to shout at him. I didn't faint myself. I had to keep pushing down. Bill couldn't watch. He turned his back.

BILL
Tell her to stop!

JEFF
Mrs. Linton!

BETTY
I had to tell him to wrap it in the blanket. The doctor had to shout at him, too. He didn't know anything. How to pick it up properly. I had to yell at him.

BILL
(Pleadingly) Stop it, Betty!

BETTY
Carry it right, Bill! Then he cradled it in his arms and ran out of the room.

BILL
(To JEFF) It soaked through the blanket. My shirt red. My arm wet. I dropped it on the kitchen floor.

BETTY
Then I heard it cry. And I knew everything was all right.

BILL
It was me you heard.

BETTY
Crying. And then the tap running.

BILL
(To JEFF) I was sick. I puked in the sink.

BETTY
(Persistingly) And I thought Bill's bathing the baby.

(BILL moves to BETTY).

BILL
A thing the size of my fist!

BETTY
(Stubbornly) It was alive inside me!

BILL
Full of blood and pus!

JEFF
(Rising) Mr. Linton!

BETTY
He's seen for himself. (Taking the photograph from her pocket) All the signs were there.

(BILL snatches the photograph from BETTY).

BILL
Like the milk in your breasts? That was something you saw.

BETTY
(Weakening) All the signs.

BILL
All swollen so you tried to ease the pressure.

BETTY
The signs.

BILL
And the way I found you. Sitting on the side of the bed crying!

BETTY
Bill, don't!

BILL
Your breasts all stained red.

BETTY
Don't!

(BILL crumples the photograph and throws it on the floor).

BILL
Could you feed a baby with that?

JEFF
(Angrily) Stop it!

(BILL sobers momentarily. Sobbing, BETTY kneels by the picture, attempting to smooth it out).

BILL
(Contritely) Betty . . . Please, Betty . . .

(BILL helps her to her feet. He loops an arm around her and takes her to JEFF).

(With a drunken pride) This is my wife of forty years.

BETTY
(Pulling away) Bill . . .

BILL

Just a minute. I've got something to say.

(BILL slumps to a sitting position at her feet).

This woman's a saint. A heart of gold. A goddamned saint. See. I can't help kneeling at her feet.

(BILL curls round her feet, muttering "a saint." He raises a hand and caresses her thigh, then impulsively lifts her dress a little, peeking under it).

BETTY

(Mortified) Bill!

(BILL rolls on his back and falls asleep. BETTY collapses in a chair at the table, sobbing).

JEFF

Please don't.

(JEFF puts an arm round her comfortingly).

BETTY

(Holding the photograph) It's all crushed.

JEFF

Here.

(JEFF takes it and smooths it out).

It's fine, you see.

BETTY

All cracked. See the lines through the face. You can't tell anymore. It could be anyone.

JEFF

No, it's you.

BETTY

Can you really tell?

JEFF

Yes.

BETTY

(Taking his hand) You're a nice boy. I'm sorry about . . .

JEFF

It doesn't matter.

BETTY

When he started drinking this afternoon, I was afraid something might happen.

JEFF

It's all right.

BETTY

But I was planning on the visit for a few days. I'd have been disappointed if we didn't come. (Rising) I'll get him to bed.

JEFF

Let me give you a hand.

BETTY

No. I've had to do this many times. But then I count my blessings, too. He'll fall asleep the moment his head hits the pillow. And I can just tiptoe out of the room and close the door.

(BETTY shakes BILL).

Bill. Bill.

(BILL staggers to his feet, and BETTY helps him to the interior door).

(In a half-whisper to JEFF) I'll be back to collect everything.

BILL

Eh?

BETTY

Nothing, Bill. I was just saying good night.

(They exit. JEFF moves about the apartment, distressed. He selects a book and attempts to read. Suddenly he returns it to the

bookcase, grabs a jacket, and leaves. After a brief pause, a timid knock at the interior door is heard. It grows more insistent as the lights fade and continues loudly for a few seconds in the blackout).

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Scene One

Late evening. A week later. The unlocking and opening of the exterior door is heard in the blackout, followed by a high-pitched, female giggle.

JEFF

Sssh!

(Someone collides with a piece of furniture, and the giggling is heard again).

(In a half-whisper) Wait.

(The overhead light is switched on, giving the apartment a subdued, yellow glow. JEFF is standing by the exterior door. JENNIE is sitting enticingly at the foot of the bed. Her legs are crossed and she is resting back on her arms. Her figure is accentuated by a tight skirt and sweater. Her apparel and an abundance of make-up give her a common touch at odds with her natural attractiveness, evident in Act One. The heavily made-up face has almost the appearance of a mask. JENNIE looks about, realizing she has sat on the bed).

JENNIE

I seem to know where I'm going in the dark.

JEFF
We'd better be a bit quiet.

JENNIE
Why? Aren't you allowed visitors?

JEFF
Yes, it's just that . . . Would you like a coffee?

JENNIE
Sure.

(JEFF plugs in the electric kettle).

(Leaning back on the bed) I like it.

JEFF
I beg your pardon?

JENNIE
Christ, you're polite.

JEFF
What?

JENNIE
That's better. Your place. It's not bad. Just moved in?

JEFF
About three weeks. I won't be doing much with it.

JENNIE
Oh?

JEFF
I'll be moving out shortly.

(Pause).

JENNIE
It won't boil, you know.

JEFF
What?

JENNIE
If you watch it.

(JEFF laughs and goes to the bed where he sits beside JENNIE).

JENNIE
(Scoldingly) You didn't make your bed.

JEFF
I suppose I could make it now. (Innocently) But it seems silly when I'll be getting into it soon.

JENNIE
(Rising) Pretty confident, aren't you?

JEFF
(Laughing) I didn't mean that.

(JENNIE moves about, inspecting the apartment).

JENNIE
Just slipped out. Honestly, you men . . . Did you read all this?

JEFF
Yes.

JENNIE
I wouldn't have the patience.

JEFF
Don't you read, Jennifer?

JENNIE
Jennie. I hate Jennifer. Makes me sound like an old maid with lots of cats. Sure I do. Magazines mostly. With lots of pictures. (Picking up a stone) What's this?

JEFF
A stone.

JENNIE
(Patiently) I know that. I mean what's it for?

JEFF
I collect them.

JENNIE
Any old rock?

JEFF
The ones I like.

JENNIE
(Incredulously) Why?

JEFF

I find them beautiful.

JENNIE

A rock?

JEFF

I think so.

JENNIE

So you look at them?

JEFF

Yes.

JENNIE

What else?

JEFF

And . . . Well, I like the way they feel.

JENNIE

So you feel them?

JEFF

Well, yes.

JENNIE

Do you play with them often?

JEFF

(Sharply) I don't play with them!

JENNIE

Kettle's boiling.

(JEFF moves to the kitchenette area where he makes two cups of instant coffee).

Cream and sugar in mine.

(JENNIE returns to the bed and sits).

So you find me pretty.

JEFF

(Laughing) Why do you say that?

JENNIE

Well, you picked me up.

JEFF
I didn't pick you up.

JENNIE
What do you call coming over to my table like that?

JEFF
You were sitting alone. I thought you might want some company.

JENNIE
You had plenty.

JEFF
At my table?

JENNIE
All those people. And each one of them talking to you. A real centre of attention, aren't you?

JEFF
They're just people I work with.

JENNIE
They started to talk about me, didn't they?

JEFF
No, of course not.

JENNIE
Oh, come on. Some of them even pointed.

JEFF
It was just that they had never seen you before. That's the staff cafeteria.

JENNIE
I know.

JEFF
And you don't work at the library.

JENNIE
I was looking for someone.

JEFF
I know practically everyone who works there. Perhaps . . .

JENNIE
Is the coffee ready?

JEFF
Sorry.

(JEFF carries the cups to the bed. He sits and they sip their coffee. A rhythmic pounding begins from somewhere in the interior of the house).

JEFF

(Irritated) Christ!

JENNIE

(Giggling) What's that?

JEFF

The landlord.

JENNIE

What's he doing?

JEFF

Building something.

JENNIE

What?

JEFF

I don't know . . . Furniture, I suppose.

JENNIE

Jesus, no wonder you're moving.

JEFF

You can hardly blame me, can you?

JENNIE

It would drive me nuts. Does he do that all the time?

JEFF

It's getting worse and worse. It's his hobby.

JENNIE

Making noise?

JEFF

(Laughing) Building furniture. You know what he did before he retired?

JENNIE

What?

JEFF

He built furniture.

(JEFF and JENNIE laugh).

JENNIE
Probably the only thing he can still do. You know what I mean?

JEFF
I . . .

JENNIE
Like he's not up to anything else.

JEFF
I suppose.

JENNIE
But I'll bet he still dreams. You men never lose the interest, do you? It's hard to understand . . . (Probingly) Is that all you ever think of?

JEFF
Of course not.

(JENNIE moves closer to JEFF. She places a hand on his knee and kisses him passionately. JEFF does not respond. She draws back).

JENNIE
(Triumphantly) A penny for your thoughts.

JEFF
(Laughing) I wasn't thinking anything.

JENNIE
(Confidently) You will.

(She continues to caress JEFF lightly but with no response).

The old ones are the funniest. It's bad of me but I love teasing them. All the signs are there, but you know they're not up to it. The panting. The sweating. Like they were trying to run up a hill for the first time in years.

JEFF
Jennie . . .

JENNIE

Yes?

JEFF

Why don't you remove . . .

(JENNIE jumps up and begins to take off her sweater).

I meant the make-up.

JENNIE

The what?

(JEFF takes a handkerchief from his pocket and wipes the lipstick from JENNIE'S mouth. JENNIE pulls away and goes to the bathroom).

JEFF

That's the bathroom.

JENNIE

I thought it might be.

(JENNIE disappears into the bathroom. The hammering stops. The sound of a tap running is heard. JEFF takes his coffee and moves to the upstage left window. JENNIE emerges from the bathroom shortly. Her appearance has altered drastically through the simple act of removing her make-up. Her face is that of a perceptive, intense woman).

Miss me?

(JEFF laughs).

Any better?

JEFF

Very much so.

JENNIE
In what way?

JEFF
Prettier.

JENNIE
More intelligent?

JEFF
I suppose.

JENNIE
More sensitive?

JEFF
Yes.

JENNIE
More of a human being?

JEFF
No!

JENNIE
I don't look better?

JEFF
I didn't say that. You looked fine before, as well.

JENNIE
(Laughing) Fine for what?

JEFF
Why do you . . .

JENNIE
The make-up and the rest?

JEFF
Yes.

JENNIE
It simplifies things.

JEFF
Simplifies things?

JENNIE
Most men don't appreciate an articulate whore. Were all those people with you in the cafeteria friends of yours?

JEFF
In a way.

JENNIE
They were quite funny.

JEFF
Funny?

JENNIE
Well, each one of them seemed to be throbbing with a personal little secret meant only for you.

JEFF
(Laughing) I'm the staff confessor.

JENNIE
I'm sure you are. The calls from across the table. A few tugging at your sleeve.

JEFF
They like to talk to me.

JENNIE
Do you usually have a little following like that?

JEFF
Well, it's just that . . .

JENNIE
No false modesty.

JEFF
Yes, I do.

JENNIE
I know why.

JEFF
You do?

JENNIE
People tend to remind me of animals. I decided then what you were.

JEFF
What?

JENNIE
A chameleon.

JEFF
(Laughing) That's not very attractive. A lizard isn't likely to draw a crowd.

JENNIE
It can if it changes colour.

JEFF

And I do?

JENNIE

Oh, yes. The transformations were incredible. A whispering grey for the mouse in the pink dress, sitting on your right. A big white grin for the hyena across the table. I watched you closely.

JEFF

And I noticed you.

JENNIE

So did the others. Honestly. The whispering. The giggling. You were peeved at their remarks about me, weren't you?

JEFF

Remarks?

JENNIE

Jeff, I'm not stupid.

JEFF

Sorry.

JENNIE

I could see you getting angry with them.

JEFF

They can be fairly petty at times.

JENNIE

So you marched over and sat with me.

JEFF

I thought you needed company.

JENNIE

I'm sure you did. Do they ever come here?

JEFF

Who?

JENNIE

Those people where you work.

JEFF

No.

JENNIE

Why?

JEFF
I don't invite them.

JENNIE
But they all like you. I could tell.

JEFF
They like what I give them.

JENNIE
Ah. A bent ear. A bit of reassurance. A pat on the back.

JEFF
I don't mind. It's what they want.

JENNIE
(Inspecting the apartment) So this is a private retreat?

JEFF
No colour changes necessary here.

(JENNIE laughs).

JENNIE
No phone?

JEFF
God, no.

JENNIE
Ringing continually. Each call, a new little crisis.

JEFF
Bulletin! Bulletin!

(JENNIE laughs).

JENNIE
That's odd. There are no new books here.

JEFF
They're my favorite ones. Those I like to reread for certain passages.

(JENNIE inspects the rock collection).

(Dryly) That's a bunch of old rocks.

JENNIE
(Laughing) I was just teasing you. (Tossing a rock to JEFF on the bed) Catch!

JEFF

(Catching it) Hey!

JENNIE

Tell me again why you like them.

JEFF

It's just the way they feel.

JENNIE

(Sitting beside him) Yes?

JEFF

The stone's always cool. There's its texture. The way one's hand can curl round it. Covering its surface. Taking its shape.

(JENNIE places her hand over JEFF'S as he holds the rock).

JENNIE

(Drawing close to him) You see. A chameleon.

JEFF

I suppose you're right.

(JEFF kisses her lightly. JENNIE returns the kiss).

JENNIE

When we first meet in the cafeteria, did you imagine we'd be sitting here like this?

(JEFF suddenly begins to laugh).

(Sharply) What's so funny?

JEFF

(Attempting to control his laughter) Nothing.

JENNIE

It's not really that funny.

JEFF

Well, you must admit . . .

JENNIE

What did you imagine we'd be doing?

JEFF

I didn't imagine anything.

JENNIE
Close your eyes.

JEFF
What?

JENNIE
(Firmly) Close your eyes.

JEFF
All right.

JENNIE
Do you see me in the cafeteria?

JEFF
Yes.

JENNIE
What comes to mind?

JEFF
I don't know.

JENNIE
Think.

JEFF
. . . Girl in need of company . . .

JENNIE
Try easy lay.

JEFF
That wasn't what I thought.

JENNIE
I'm not offended that you did. You see.

(JENNIE takes JEFF'S hand and places it on her breast).

I'll tell you a little secret. It's strange, you know, having a body made for one thing.

(As she speaks, JENNIE slides his hand gradually down her body in the direction of her crotch).

JENNIE
(Laughing) It sweeps itself out once a month and waits for gentleman callers. Each month. Month after month. A re-opening wound.

(JEFF pulls his hand away).

What's wrong? Isn't that what you brought me back here for?

JEFF
I just thought you needed someone to talk to.

JENNIE
We could have done that at the restaurant. Thank you for dinner, by the way. Did you assume we'd be in bed by now?

JEFF
Of course not.

JENNIE
The thought didn't occur to you?

JEFF
Jennie, of course, but . . .

JENNIE
Shall I tell you how you pictured it?

JEFF
Jennie!

JENNIE
A snug blanket of soft skin to cover your own and make it aware of itself. Hands caressing your back, allowing it to feel its own warmth and firmness. That's difficult to do on your own, isn't it?

JEFF
Jennie . . .

JENNIE
A trailing finger showing you the curve of your spine. A mirror that fondles you.

JEFF
It would have been more than that.

JENNIE
(Brokenly) Oh, you would have been gentle with me. Kissed me with the appropriate measure of tenderness afterwards. But then you're polite. That's more than some of the others have been.

JEFF
There would have been more.

JENNIE
(Bitterly) Gratitude. I forgot. Gratitude, as well, for keeping you company through the whole thing.

(JENNIE begins to cry).

JEFF
Jennie, don't.

(JEFF puts an arm around her. JENNIE pulls away and goes to the bookcase. She picks up a rock as if to distract herself. JEFF goes to her).

Jennie, it would have been different.

JENNIE
I don't know.

JEFF
Sure it would.

JENNIE
I'd better be going. It's late.

JEFF
(Referring to the rock) It's a beautiful colour, isn't it?

JENNIE
It's the prettiest.

JEFF
(Impulsively) Would you like it?

JENNIE
What?

JEFF
Maybe, you don't want it?

JENNIE
Oh, no.

JEFF
Keep it, if you like.

JENNIE

Thank you.

(JENNIE collects her purse).

JEFF

I'll see you home.

JENNIE

No. It's fine.

(JENNIE moves to the exterior door).

JEFF

Can I see you again?

JENNIE

If you want to.

JEFF

Tomorrow night?

JENNIE

All right.

JEFF

We'll have dinner at the same place. About six?

JENNIE

Yes.

(JENNIE exits. Fade out).

Scene Two

Early morning of the following day. As an early morning light filters through the windows, the hammering from the interior of the house begins. The silhouette of a figure standing by the foot of the bed can be seen. As the light increases, the audience is able to discern that it is BETTY. JEFF is sprawled on the bed with the blankets tossed to one side.

BETTY

(Softly) Jeff.

(JEFF stirs in his sleep).

Jeff.

JEFF

(Sitting up) What is it?

BETTY

I'm sorry but I think you're late.

(BETTY goes discreetly to the kitchen-ette area as JEFF gets up and dresses).

I'll just make some coffee.

JEFF

Don't bother.

BETTY

No bother.

JEFF

(Sharply) I don't want any coffee!

(For a moment, BETTY appears at a loss as to what to do. Then she moves to the bed and begins to make it).

JEFF

That's not necessary.

BETTY

I forgot yesterday.

JEFF

(Irritated) Leave it!

BETTY

(Spotting the cups by the bed) Company?

JEFF

What?

BETTY

Two cups. That's nice.

JEFF

(Sarcastically) You don't mind if I have people in, do you?

BETTY

As many as you want. Bill said he heard voices.

JEFF

I am paying for this place.

BETTY

(Collecting the cups) I didn't hear anything myself. A girl.

JEFF

What?

BETTY

(Holding up one of the cups) Lipstick.

(BETTY takes the cups to the sink).

JEFF

(Angrily) Does he have to pound like that this early in the morning?

BETTY

I'm sorry.

JEFF

No need to be. I'm giving my notice.

BETTY

Your notice?

JEFF

I'm moving out.

BETTY

(Apprehensively) Not right away?

JEFF

Saturday.

(JEFF takes his cheque book from his jacket and sits at the table).

I'll pay you for the following month, naturally.

BETTY

It's the noise. I was afraid it might bother you. If that's the reason, Bill's almost finished.

JEFF

It's not that.

BETTY

If you tell me, maybe I can . . .

JEFF

I've decided the apartment isn't suitable.

BETTY

Suitable?

JEFF

(Handing her the cheque) Yes.

BETTY

There's no need to pay . . .

JEFF

I want to. Excuse me. I'm late.

(JEFF goes to the exterior door. BETTY extends the lunch bag to him but he exits, ignoring her. Fade out).

Scene Three

Late Friday evening of the same week. There is the sound of the exterior door being unlocked. It crashes open. JENNIE giggles. JEFF laughs loudly. He switches on the overhead light. JEFF is carrying his jacket and a bottle in a brown paper bag. JENNIE is wearing a becoming dress and subtle make-up.

JEFF
(Loudly) We're home! We're home!

JENNIE
Ssh.

JEFF
(A little drunkenly) What?

JENNIE
You'll wake up the whole house.

JEFF
I pay for this place. I'm allowed to greet my apartment upon my return.

JENNIE
(Laughing) Yes, you are.

JEFF
And this is my last night.

JENNIE
Yes.

JEFF
So I'm entitled to a party.

JENNIE
You're very funny when you've been drinking.

JEFF

(Brightening) Drinking!

JENNIE

(Taking the bottle) I'll mix them.

(JEFF goes to the bed and sits).

JEFF

That was a good evening, wasn't it?

JENNIE

Marvellous.

(JEFF selects a volume from the bookcase and leafs through it).

JEFF

There's something I want to show you.

JENNIE

What?

JEFF

It's my favorite passage. I'm sure you'll like it.

(JENNIE brings the drinks to the bed. JEFF hands her the book).

The first paragraph.

(JENNIE reads the passage).

JENNIE

It's good, isn't it?

JEFF

(Pleased) I think so.

JENNIE

It's a beautiful description. A little green island of sunlight, surrounded by dark woods. Just the right choice of phrases. The soft syllables.

JEFF

There's an enclosure of heavier repeated sounds. You see here. Like an embrace of tall, sheltering trees.

JENNIE

Yes, it's beautiful.

JEFF

You really think so?

JENNIE

Lie back.

(JEFF does so).

Close your eyes. Now tell me what you see.

JEFF

The brightness of the clearing. Sometimes I can even sense the sunlight, filtering through the branches. I feel a pattern of warmth on my body.

(JENNIE places her fingers lightly on JEFF'S chest. She lifts them and places them a little lower on his body).

(Giggling) What are you doing?

JENNIE

Sssh! I'm shafts of sunlight.

JEFF

(Laughing) Jennie, don't.

JENNIE

(Moving down his body) Dapple, dapple.

JEFF

Jennie!

JENNIE

Dapple! Dapple!

(A rhythmic hammering from the interior of the house begins. JEFF sits up).

JEFF

Jesus Christ!

JENNIE

Isn't that annoying!

JEFF

I'll fix things.

(JEFF stamps violently on the floor. The hammering ceases. JENNIE applauds).

JEFF
(Bowing) I should have done that long ago.

(JEFF sits on the bed. JENNIE cuddles up to him. She raises a hand to his face and gently traces his features).

JENNIE
They may come up.

JEFF
What if they do? It's my apartment.

JENNIE
You've got such a straight nose. What are they like?

JEFF
Just an old couple.

JENNIE
Soft skin and here coarse where the whiskers begin. Do they come up here often?

JEFF
Too often.

JENNIE
Uninvited?

JEFF
Yes.

(A slight pause).

JENNIE
Do you go down there often?

JEFF
Where?

JENNIE
Downstairs. (Kissing him lightly) Where do you think?

JEFF
Sometimes.

(JENNIE frees a few buttons on his shirt. Her hand traces over his chest).

JENNIE
What's it like?

JEFF
What?

JENNIE
Downstairs.

JEFF
Why do you ask?

JENNIE
Just curious. They keep the curtains closed. I couldn't see anything when we came in.

JEFF
They always do.

JENNIE
(Snuggling up to JEFF) It must be dark.

JEFF
Yes.

JENNIE
Tell me about it.

JEFF
. . . Musty, too. Closed up like that.

JENNIE
Yes.

JEFF
The smells building up down there in layers. Mouldering boxes. Thousands of meals cooked. The odours seep into this place.

JENNIE
I can't smell anything.

JEFF
Are you sure?

JENNIE
Yes. I'm sure the downstairs is cleaned regularly.

JEFF
(A little drunkenly) But each time, a little dust gets left behind. Collecting a little more each time. Until now, there's enough to fill a grave.

(JENNIE jumps up and pulls JEFF by the hand).

JENNIE

Show me.

JEFF

(Sobering) What?

JENNIE

I want to see for myself.

JEFF

Don't be silly!

JENNIE

They're probably gone to bed. We can be very quiet.

JEFF

Jennie!

JENNIE

(Pulling him towards the interior door) Oh, come on!

JEFF

(Breaking away angrily) Stop it!

(A slight pause).

JENNIE

I'm sorry, Jeff.

JEFF

It's all right.

(JENNIE kisses him lightly, then moves to the interior door).

(Weakly) Jennie . . .

JENNIE

I don't mind going alone.

JEFF

What if they're still up?

JENNIE

I'll borrow a cup of sugar.

(JENNIE exits).

(Jeff, upset, goes to the bed and collects his drink. He finishes it. He moves to the interior door, closes it, and returns to the bed. He picks up the book by the bed and attempts to read, but his concentration is on the interior door. There is a sudden knock at the door. It opens and JENNIE steps out of the passageway).

JENNIE

(Brightly) I'm back.

JEFF

You weren't very long.

JENNIE

No.

JEFF

(With a strained laugh) No cup of sugar?

(JENNIE sits beside JEFF on the bed).

JENNIE

Let me see. Where were we?

(She tosses JEFF'S book on the floor. She begins to trace his features again. JEFF pulls away).

JEFF

Why do you do that?

JENNIE

No reason.

(She continues to do so).

Why did you lie to me?

JEFF

What?

JENNIE
Downstairs. It's not the way you described it.

JEFF
Oh?

JENNIE
Very clean. All the furniture polished. Nicer than up here, in fact. Why did you say those things?

JEFF
I thought it might . . .

JENNIE
You thought?

JEFF
Yes.

JENNIE
You've never been downstairs.

JEFF
They've never asked me down.

JENNIE
Well, you haven't missed much. A kitchen. A bathroom. A living room. A couple of bedrooms.

JEFF
You didn't meet anyone?

JENNIE
The bedroom doors were closed.

(A pause).

JEFF
What's he building?

JENNIE
Building?

JEFF
The old man. The hammering.

JENNIE
I didn't notice anything. Perhaps it's in the basement.

JEFF
She said it was on the main floor.

JENNIE
I didn't notice anything.

JEFF
The sound comes from the main floor.

JENNIE
I didn't see anything.

JEFF
Are you sure?

JENNIE
Nothing.

(JENNIE kisses JEFF passionately).

I've got a lousy memory. Is that where we were before I left?

(JEFF laughs).

That's better.

(JENNIE slips her hand inside his shirt. JEFF kisses her passionately, placing a hand on her knee).

JEFF
Jennie . . .

JENNIE
I thought I'd lost my appeal.

JEFF
You haven't. I want you.

JENNIE
I want you too.

JEFF
(Tenderly) Jennie.

(JEFF'S hand moves slightly up her thigh).

JENNIE
We shouldn't though.

JEFF
Why not?

JENNIE
We shouldn't.

(JEFF'S hand slides up her thigh).

JEFF

Sure we can.

JENNIE

(Giggling) Don't, Jeff.

JEFF

(Laughing) And why not?

JENNIE

Don't.

JEFF

Why?

JENNIE

It's that time of the month for me.

(A slight pause).

JEFF

What?

JENNIE

I'm sorry.

(JEFF breaks away from her angrily and goes to the window. JENNIE follows, standing behind him).

Please, Jeff . . .

(JENNIE presses her body against his back).

It was stupid of me not to mention . . . Please, Jeff.

(Her hands move down his body).

It's not that I don't want you. You see.

(JEFF turns to her and she kisses him. She takes him by the arm and sits him on the bed, then kneels beside him. She removes his shoes and socks).

JEFF

What are you doing?

JENNIE

Ticklish?

(JENNIE trails her hair caressingly across his bare feet as one hand frees the buttons on his shirt).

JEFF

Jennie . . .

JENNIE

(Removing his shirt) Just putting you to bed.

JEFF

You're not going?

JENNIE

I should.

JEFF

I want you to stay.

JENNIE

I could, I suppose.

JEFF

And you can help me pack in the morning.

JENNIE

Jeff?

JEFF

What?

JENNIE

I want you but I . . .

JEFF

Yes?

JENNIE

I don't know how you feel about . . . It bothers some men.

JEFF

It wouldn't matter.

JENNIE

Are you sure?

JEFF

Yes.

JENNIE

It's close to the end.

(JENNIE unzips her dress as she moves to the light switch by the exterior door).

No worse than nicking our wrists and holding them together.

(JENNIE switches off the light and moves towards the bed in the blackout).

JEFF

(Giggling a bit drunkenly) Blood brothers.

JENNIE

Just a few drops.

JEFF

Yes.

JENNIE

A tiny baptism.

(There is the sound of a body settling into the bed).

Scene Four

Early morning of the following day. Light gradually filters through the windows. When JENNIE can be discerned, sitting in the upstage left armchair, a rhythmic hammering from the interior of the house begins. JEFF stirs in his sleep. The thudding increases in volume and quickens in pace. JEFF becomes more agitated. The hammering builds to a crescendo and then ceases.

JEFF

Jennie!

JENNIE

(Rising from the chair) I'm here.

JEFF

Jennie . . .

(JENNIE, dressed as she was in the previous scene, goes to the bed. JEFF embraces her).

JENNIE

What's wrong?

JEFF

I don't . . .

JENNIE

You're shaking. A bad dream?

JEFF

Yes.

JENNIE
I've been up for a while.

JEFF
Jennie, she had no face.

JENNIE
Sssh, everything's all right.

JEFF
It was just a wrinkled mask. Deeper creases where the eyes and mouth should have been. The flesh in flaps on the arms. In folds along the thighs.

JENNIE
Just a bad dream, Jeff. You were sleeping so soundly for such a long time. I didn't have the heart to wake you when I got up.

JEFF
I was there, Jennie, in a shadow. Standing close to her. But in a shadow. I should have gone away but I was sure she couldn't see me.

JENNIE
A dream, Jeff. Sleeping so soundly, at first. You're beautiful when you're sleeping. Did you know that?

(JEFF, preoccupied with the dream,

says nothing).

(Gently tracing his features) Your face, perfectly smooth. No knitting of the eyebrows. The lines by the eyes erased. The lips lying softly by each other. And then you began to toss.

JEFF
She was stroking . . .

JENNIE
I wasn't sure what I should do.

JEFF
Stroking. The bulge had stretched her skin smooth. I watched. She was stroking it proudly. The one part of her swollen smooth. I thought she couldn't see me. I stayed.

JENNIE
I thought perhaps I should wake you.

JEFF
I felt something on my arm. I shouldn't have stayed. I looked down, and her hand locked into place. She pulled my hand forward.

JENNIE
I was afraid to wake you.

JEFF
Pulled harder when I tried to draw back. Closer to her. And still closer until . . .

JENNIE
(Stroking his head) Just a bad dream, Jeff.

JEFF
My hand touched . . .

JENNIE
A dream.

JEFF
Yes.

JENNIE
What were we supposed to do this morning?

JEFF
I don't know.

JENNIE
Pack!

JEFF
Yes.

(JEFF gets up and begins to dress).

The suitcases are in there, Jennie.

JENNIE
You want to pack right away?

JEFF
Yes.

(JENNIE removes the two suitcases and the box from the bin. She takes the box to the bookcase. JEFF empties the chest of drawers, tossing belongings into the

suitcase. JENNIE watches him. She laughs suddenly. JEFF stops).

JEFF

(Seriously) What's funny?

JENNIE

You. Everything will be crushed.

JEFF

It doesn't matter.

JENNIE

Do you want me to pack that way?

JEFF

Sure.

(With a sweep of her arm, JENNIE knocks the rock collection, clattering into the box. JENNIE laughs, JEFF joins in, laughing in a strained manner).

JENNIE

(Holding up a book) I want to buy a copy of this today.

JEFF

What?

JENNIE

The book you showed me, last night.

JEFF

Oh, yes.

JENNIE

I remember the page number for the passage. Did you have any luck, yesterday?

JEFF

Luck?

JENNIE

Finding a new place.

JEFF

No.

JENNIE
Well, where are you going then?

JEFF
I don't know . . . I'll find a place soon. I'll get a room for a few days.

(JEFF closes one suitcase and is about to close the second).

JENNIE
Stop!

JEFF
What?

JENNIE
The bathroom. You forgot your things in the bathroom.

(JEFF goes to the bathroom. JENNIE carries the open suitcase to the bed. There is a knock at the interior door).

(Calling) Jeff!

(BILL and BETTY enter. BETTY is obviously wearing her "good" dress, slightly out of style, worn only a few times, for special occasions. BILL'S suit carries a similar impression. BILL seems uncomfortable in it. JENNIE does not look at them but remains facing the bathroom. JEFF enters, carrying an assortment of toiletries. He pauses as he sees the Lintons. BETTY smiles. JEFF moves to the suitcase on the bed and deposits the articles. JENNIE takes his arm and kisses him lightly on the lips. BILL laughs).

BETTY
My, but we're romantic for so early in the morning.

BILL
(Laughing) Best time of day. I've been trying to convince Betty of that for years.

(A slight pause).

BETTY
(To JEFF) Bill's finished.

BILL
(With satisfaction) All done.

BETTY
You tell him, Bill. He did all the work.

BILL
Ah, it wasn't that much.

BETTY
(With sincerity) It was. You've got a right to be proud.

BILL
You really think so?

BETTY
Yes, I do.

BILL
(Awkwardly) You gonna congratulate me?

(BETTY kisses BILL lightly. He responds with a hard kiss. BETTY draws away).

BETTY
(Embarrassed) Bill . . .

JENNIE
(Aside to JEFF) They're charming.

BETTY
Tell him, Bill.

BILL
Just a room.

BETTY
Downstairs.

BILL
Took me a while. Had to divide off the living room. Turned out well, even if I do say so myself. There's a good-sized window. Wood panelling.

BETTY
A carpet. A nice green. And there's a tree just outside the window.

JEFF
(Vehemently) I don't want it.

BETTY
But you haven't even seen it.

BILL
(Gruffly) Don't beg, Betty. If he wants to act that way, let him.

JENNIE
It's not that he doesn't want it. He's moving, you see. Isn't that it, Jeff?

JEFF
(Quickly) Yes. I told you, remember. I paid for the next month.

BETTY
Yes, you did.

JEFF
I was just going to write you a note before I left.

BETTY
I'm sure you would have left a note. (To JENNIE) He's such a nice boy, isn't he?

JENNIE
Yes, he is.

BILL
Where are you going?

JEFF
Well, my plans aren't definite yet.

BETTY
Oh?

JEFF
I was thinking . . . of going home.

BILL

Where?

JEFF

. . . Home . . . (To JENNIE for support) We were just talking about it, weren't we?

JENNIE

(Taking his arm) Yes, that's right.

BETTY

You told me your parents had passed away.

JEFF

I'm sure I didn't say that.

BETTY

I remember.

JEFF

It was a joke.

BILL

(Gruffly) A joke?

BETTY

I'm sure he didn't mean a joke, Bill. Do they live far?

JEFF

. . . Morris . . . Morrisville.

BILL

Never heard of it.

BETTY

It must be far.

BILL

How far?

JEFF

Two hundred miles.

JENNIE

(At the same time) One hundred miles.

(JENNIE giggles).

Well, something like that.

JEFF

There's a bus that passes through the town.

BILL

The Morrisville bus?

JEFF

It's not called that. It's only a small town, you see. Just a stop along the way.

BILL

What's the bus?

JEFF

I . . . I can't recall, offhand.

BILL

(Laughing) Then chances are you'll get on the wrong one.

BETTY

(Laughing) Bill! He's such a tease.

(JENNIE begins to laugh, as well.

JEFF looks at her, apprehensively).

JENNIE

I'm sorry, Jeff, but I can just picture you on the wrong bus. Going for miles and miles. Not recognizing a thing out the window.

(The laughter of the three fades

away. A slight pause).

BETTY

That's a lovely dress.

JENNIE

Why, thank you. I like the colour of yours.

BETTY

It's a bit bright for my age.

JENNIE

No, it suits you.

BETTY

It was going to be a special occasion.

BILL

She's been working like a dog all morning. I never seen a breakfast like that.

BETTY
Eggs. Bacon. Toast and jam. Pancakes, too. I'm afraid I burnt them a bit. And two pots of coffee.

JENNIE
That sounds good.

BETTY
It'll be cold before long.

JENNIE
(To JEFF) I'm hungry.

BETTY
A meal before a long trip might be a good thing.

BILL
Specially if you're getting on the wrong bus.

(The trio laugh).

JENNIE
Oh, but we can't.

BETTY
Why not?

JENNIE
Jeff isn't dressed for the occasion.

(All three laugh again. JENNIE takes a sportscoat and hairbrush from the open suitcase. She drapes the jacket over JEFF'S shoulders, then brushes his hair. BILL collects the box; BETTY, the two suitcases. JENNIE takes JEFF'S arm. He pulls away, weakly).

(Kissing him lightly) Please, for Jennie.

(JENNIE leads him to the interior door. They exit, followed by BILL and BETTY).

CURTAIN